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The Doctrine of Atonement briefly considered;

In a SERIES of

LETTERS

TO A

YOUNG GENTLEMAN

At the UNIVERSITY.

To which is added,

Dr. DUCHAL's LETTER,

TO

Dr. TAYLOR, on the ſame Subject.

By W. GRAHAM, M. A.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE

Rev. JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. FRS.

THESE LETTERS

ARE INSCRIBED,

BY

HIS MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

The AUTHOR.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

COULD I deny any requeſt of yours, it ſhould be that of giving you my ſentiments on a ſubject of ſo difficult diſcuſſion, though long and much agitated, and yet of ſuch reputed importance, as the ſubject of *Chriſt*'s *atonement*; a ſubject on which I would not have you imagine that I can advance any thing new, though ſome things may appear in a light in which they are not commonly ſeen, or attended to. It is with ſome degrees of reluctance, and many more of diffidence, that I enter upon it; not ſo much on account of the obloquy which the manner of treating it may expoſe me to (for you know I have no popularity to riſque) as from an apprehenſion that I ſhall not be able to do juſtice to it.

The doctrine of *Chriſt's Satisfaction*, in the calviniſtic ſenſe of it, like other religious errors, has ſtood its ground a conſiderable time, and ſtill ſeems a leading article in the *popular ſyſtem*; and I ſhould not have thought of attacking a favorite principle, which by its long eſtabliſhment pleads preſcription, had I not believed it, at the ſame time, to be a deſtructive one, and that lays the axe to the root of religion and morals. In this light I have always beheld it, and wiſh I may be ſucceſsful in the preſent attempt to place it in a better. And though I dare not flatter myſelf with a favourable hearing from the world, I am happy in believing that perſons of the ſame ingenuous diſpoſition and liberal ſentiments with yourſelf, will conſider what I have to ſay without prejudice, and follow the lead of truth.

Freedom of inquiry, eſpecially on religious topics, is of ſo great moment, that I am confident the religion of Jeſus will never appear to its greateſt advantage, nor in the light which its friends would wiſh to ſee it in, ſo long as any embargo is laid upon it. What a load of rubbiſh has this

pearl

pearl of great price lain under for many ages! And how obnoxious have all efforts hitherto been to free it from the cumberſome load! But as with me popular prejudice and clamour are of the loweſt conſequence, and the perverſion of chriſtianity likely to draw after it conſequences of a worſe nature, I ſhall, without farther preface or apology, lay open a corruption that has long been the reproach of religion, and ſanctified the attacks of infidelity.

You aſk what I mean by the *Satisfaction of Chriſt?* Whether the ſentiments of *orthodoxy* on this ſubject be the ſentiments of the New Teſtament? if not, how they came to prevail ſo much; and what are the natural and probable conſequences of them? To each of theſe you ſhall have my anſwer in as few words as I can, conſiſtently with plainneſs and perſpicuity, give it.

Satisfaction is an equivocal term, that has various ideas affixed to it. Sometimes it denotes the pleaſure which the mind takes in any thing that is the object of our hopes and purſuits; very often it means the re-

dreſſing of grievances, and repairing damages and injuries done or received; and, laſtly, it denotes the obedience due to the commands of a ſuperior, properly made known to us. Satisfaction in this laſt ſenſe of it may very juſtly be applied to Chriſt. Agreeable to the idiom of the Latin tongue, one is ſaid to *ſatisfy*, or *pleaſe*, his ſuperior, when he regards his inſtructions, and obeys his reaſonable commands. Thus a ſervant, who acts with fidelity in his department, and is true to the truſt repoſed in him, *ſatisfies* his maſter. Thus alſo a ſoldier ſatisfies his commander, when he behaves with propriety in the poſt aſſigned him. And thus Chriſt ſatisfied his heavenly Father by an unreſerved obedience and ſubmiſſion to his laws and government. *He became obedient to death, even the death of the croſs.* Lactantius, ſpeaking of a ſinner, ſays, that when he repents of his paſt miſconduct, and follows a better courſe of life, he *ſatisfies God*, i. e. *obeys God*, who would have all men to repent and be ſaved. And (adds the ſame author) whoſoever ſerves God with true devotion, will ſoon acquire habits of juſtice, &c. for that

is to obey God, and *ſatisfy* both religion and his duty,

This I take to be the true ſcriptural notion of Chriſt's ſatisfaction; but it had been much better expreſſed by the word *obedience*, in which there is leſs ambiguity; for on all hands it ſeems agreed, that nothing tends more to introduce confuſion into our ideas of religion than *equivocal terms*, and undefined unſcriptural language, with which religious ſyſtems ſo much abound.

Satisfaction, in the other ſenſe of it, as implying a reparation of injuries, is not, I apprehend, to be found in the New Teſtament, as applicable to Chriſt, nor indeed any other word of a ſimilar ſignification, as I ſhall ſhew in ſome ſubſequent letters. It is what we commonly call a *forenſic* term, borrowed from the civil law, and means the reparation of damages or injuries, where ſuch reparation is demanded, or deemed neceſſary. But ſurely no one will think this term rightly applied, when applied to the redemption of Chriſt. This leads me to conſider the *Calviniſtic* or current notion of Satisfaction; but, afraid

of being tedious at firſt ſetting out, ſhall reſerve it for the ſubject of my next.

I am, yours.

LETTER II.

SIR,

IN my laſt, I explained what I take to be the ſcripture notion of the term *Satisfaction*, as applied to Chriſt, viz. his obedience to God, or the perfect rectitude of his moral character. Any other notion of his ſatisfaction cannot, I think, be cleverly made out. *Syſtematic divines* have tacked, however, to this obedience of his certain conſequences, which, were they juſt, would deſtroy all virtue and morality; but thoſe gentlemen, I find, never had intereſt enough with you to warp or miſlead your judgement, and I truſt never will. They are, indeed, dangerous guides to follow almoſt on any ſubject, but on none more than the ſubject of Chriſt's *ſuppoſed ſatisfaction*. Under pretence of doing honour

nour to the chriſtian ſcheme, and of magnifying the redemption there deſcribed, they have, in fact, been all along expoſing both to juſt ridicule.

Their opinion is, that the obedience and ſufferings of Chriſt are a compleat ſatisfaction for the ſins of the world; that he ſuffered in perſon, and without a figure, all that puniſhment which ſinners deſerved, and are threatened with, even the wrath of God, the wrath of conſcience, and the torments of hell; that, without a ſacrifice and ſatisfaction of this kind, God neither could, nor would forgive ſin, even in penitent characters! I know not how this language will ſound in your ears, but it will undoubtedly make *his* ears tingle who has not been familiariſed to it! You will be apt to ſay this is Calviniſm with a witneſs! and I may add with a vengeance too! but withal perfectly irreconcileable to every principle of reaſon, common ſenſe, and chriſtianity. Whatever favourable ideas one may form of the God of the univerſe (and to an attentive and well diſpoſed mind they can be no other than favourable) the natural inference from the

foregoing

foregoing ſcheme is that *Calvin*'s *Deity* is too implacable to be *that God*. And, indeed, the narrow, malevolent, and hereticating ſpirit of his followers, which for a long while has been an object of attention, and has not eſcaped your own obſervation, does not a little confirm that ſuſpicion. Whatever be a man's religious principles, his temper and character will more or leſs derive a tincture from them, and be influenced by them. Paſſing this.—

There is, I think, no principle in religion and philoſophy more inconteſtable than the *placability* of the divine nature, nor any truth more comfortable to the human mind. Wherever we turn our eyes we have viſible proofs of it. Not to mention our own internal feelings. Such ſcenes of goodneſs and mercy daily and every where preſent themſelves, as will and muſt excite the grateful admiration of thoughtful obſervers. Such is the gracious conſtitution and plan of providence, that even for thoſe who hurt themſelves by their vices, and injure their health by riot and intemperance, there are remedies provided in nature. By ſuch remedies they are often relieved to a conſiderable

conſiderable degree, as well as by the compaſſionate care of their fellow creatures. Can one wiſh for a ſtronger proof of the mercy of our creator? And yet an equally ſtrong one ariſes from the affection which all animals are obſerved to have for their offſpring, whoſe ſafety and preſervation they are ſo attentive to, that they will expoſe themſelves to any dangers, and riſque their lives in their defence; and this ſo univerſally, that an exception to the contrary is not, perhaps, to be found in nature. The argument concludes ſtill ſtronger with regard to human kind. *Their* feelings for their offſpring, even in the caſe of repeated profligacy and diſſipation, are ſeldom or ever extinguiſhed. *Would God I had died for thee, O Abſalom, my ſon, my ſon!* Though in a conſpiracy againſt his father's life and throne, how freely did the Monarch's tears flow when he heard that his diſſipated ſon was no more!

To diſinherit a child, much more to put him to death for a few indiſcretions, is what no parent will do who is not diveſted of the feelings of nature, and become a monſter in the moral world. And thus

human

human nature will always operate, where it is not checked and borne down by ſome contrary principle, or corrupted by ſuperſtition. Can we ſuppoſe leſs goodneſs in the Father of all, leſs concern for the moral works of his own hands? Is not the idea of a *friend* always comprehended under that of a *father?*

Beſides, we find in human nature a diſpoſition to forgive injuries, and that ſentiments of mercy and compaſſion always raiſe our ideas of and eſteem for the character where they reſide. Worthy minds are always the leaſt ſuſceptible of unfriendly impreſſions, and as conſtantly rejoice in ſhewing mercy to ſuch as are the proper objects of it; whereas the cruel, unforgiving, relentleſs diſpoſitions, form a character that no one can poſſibly think or ſpeak of without indignation. But what has all this to do with the placability of the divine nature? Are theſe any proofs that God will pardon his offending offſpring upon their penitence? Undoubtedly. Theſe prove that the author of nature is good and merciful. Where there are ſo many marks of compaſſion in the works of his hands,

hands, it is not, I think, poſſible to ſuppoſe him ill affected toward his moral offspring. By forming them with ſentiments of mercy and compaſſion for each other, he has abundantly diſplayed his own campaſſionate regards for the human world.

I am, yours.

LETTER III.

SIR,

IT muſt give you no inconſiderable ſatisfaction to find the ſentiments of nature and revelation with regard to the divine placability every where coinciding. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, ſlow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. Like as a father pitieth his children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him. He is good to the evil and unthankful. God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten ſon, &c.* Had not God been merciful (eſſentially ſo) he would have deſtroyed his moral offspring the very moment they had offended. Had

not

not mercy been his characteriſtic, he would not have ſent Chriſt into the world at all. The renovation of the human race, the republication of true religion, the calling and recovering men to glory and virtue, are never in Scripture aſcribed to any inferior agent, but always to God himſelf. Though our Saviour bore an illuſtrious part in the ſcheme of redemption, and with equal luſtre ſupported his character, yet he was not, as the Calviniſts affirm, the *procuring or meritorious cauſe* of it, but only an *inſtrument* employed by his Father. It was *God that raiſed him up to be a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and remiſſion of ſins.*

In ſhort, from all that we feel in ourſelves, from every thing viſible around us, and from the general ſtrain of revealed religion, we are inſtructed and authorized to conclude, that God will forgive ſin upon repentance, without any ſatisfaction. I do not find that any ſatisfaction, beſides *penitence*, is ever inſiſted on, or ſo much as mentioned in the ſacred records.

With

With regard to God, *Satisfaction* can have no place, and ſeems highly abſurd; for it implies, if not indigence, yet at leaſt imperfection. You do not, I hope, conceive of the ſupreme being as of an ambitious, paſſionate, and revengeful monarch, who, upon every ſlight provocation, is for carrying fire and ſword into his neighbour's territory, inſiſting on rigorous ſatisfaction for real or ſuppoſed injuries. No Sir, I have a better opinion of your underſtanding and temper. Such a character diſgraces even the *man*, and cannot without blaſphemy be aſcribed to God. What ſatisfaction can a being want who is poſſeſſed of all perfection? What injury can poſſibly be done to ſuch a being? *If thou ſinneſt, what doſt thou againſt him, or if thy tranſgreſſions be multiplied, what doſt thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what giveſt thou him, or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedneſs may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteouſneſs may profit the ſon of man.* And where no perſonal injury is done, or can be done, there is no ſatisfaction due. If there is any injury in the caſe, it muſt be to the community, who are capable of feeling the effects of vice,

and

and to whom ſatisfaction, therefore, of right belongs. But when the whole community of mankind are the offenders, what muſt be done? Muſt they all be eternally conſigned to miſery, without hope of redemption? Why then were they created, and placed in a ſtate of probation? Such a ſtate implies miſtakes, as well as penitence. Elſe we talk of a ſtate of diſcipline with no ſort of propriety; for, in fact, there can be no ſuch thing. When the *Spaniards* conquered Mexico, it is ſaid that they put all the inhabitants to the ſword, fearing they might rebel in ſome future time, were they left alive. To ſave the country they deſtroyed the people; juſt the reverſe of what good policy required.

Somewhat ſimilar to this, is the repreſentation given by Theologians of the adminiſtration of the univerſe. The omnipotent arm at the head of it was actually lifted up, ready to ſtrike the blow, and diſcharge the thunderbolt on a ſinful world, when Chriſt ſeaſonably interpoſed, to wreſt it out of his hands. This kind of divinity needs no labour of yours or mine to expoſe it, and it might be deemed egregious

gious folly to attempt it; for ſink it *muſt*, under the weight of its own abſurdity. I would, however, aſk the patrons of it, how the honour and majeſty of divine government can be vindicated upon ſuch a ſcheme?

Are not proper ſentiments of God, as the gracious father and governor of the world, the foundation of all true and acceptable religion? But who, I beſeech you, will honour, love, and truſt a being, of whom he has not a good opinion, or pay him the homage of reaſon and affection? I hope I need not caution you againſt viewing the beſt of beings in the light of a tyrant, determined to make ſinful men for ever miſerable, had not Jeſus interpoſed. This is not only degrading his character, but alſo transferring our allegiance from him to Chriſt. For I certainly owe that being a truer gratitude and affection who reſcues me from miſery, than I do him who gave me exiſtence; but who, notwithſtanding, for the ſmalleſt peccadillo, which it is impoſſible for me to ſtand clear of in this ſtate, decrees my deſtruction.

It would be too hazardous for men to be born into a world where penitence could do them no ſervice, nor conciliate the regards of him who brought them into it. Were it left to his choice, who would wiſh to appear in life upon ſuch terms? Who would not wiſh, after he comes into it, a ſpeedy retreat from a world thus capriciouſly governed, or rather not governed at all? Had the advocates for this monſtrous ſcheme been attentive to the amiable light in which nature, not to ſay revelation exhibits the deity, they never would have admitted the idea of *implacability*. By ſaying he is *placable* only in conſideration of a *ſatisfaction*, it is plain they had no other idea; and yet this is ſaying nothing, and worſe than nothing; for it is ſtill holding him up in the light of a capricious being, who is pleaſed with expenſive offerings, and moved by foreign conſiderations to do what he is not naturally and eſſentially diſpoſed to do.

I am, yours.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

SIR,

AND therefore to your inquiry, Whether the obedience and ſufferings of Chriſt are to be conſidered as a compleat ſatisfaction to the juſtice of God for the ſins of men, my anſwer is, By no means. It is an irrational and abſurd doctrine; a mere figment of the dark ages, when ſcholaſtic and metaphyſical jargon triumphed over truth, reaſon, and common ſenſe.

It will be neceſſary, before we advance farther, to have a clear and diſtinct idea of the juſtice of God, which I take to be a principle not oppoſite to goodneſs, but *only a modification of it*. We muſt not repreſent thoſe perfections as incompatible attributes, as if the divine mind were agitated by two contrary deſires, a deſire to bleſs and a deſire to curſe, to puniſh and to ſpare the criminal, No. And yet if we may believe *theologic ſyſtems*, thoſe attributes of deity required ſuch a ſatisfaction as that of Chriſt, to bring them into ac-

cord and harmony. But ſuch idle reveries apart! Juſtice in God is the ſame with goodneſs, or a diſpoſition to ſecure and promote the happineſs of his moral kingdom, by a proper diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments. No kingdom can long ſubſiſt where the laws do not operate, and are not executed upon the diſturbers of it. It is not with a view to gratify the reſentment or ambition of the ruler, or to revenge the affront put upon him, that crimes are animadverted upon. Puniſhment is by no means an act of *revenge*, either in God or man; for moſt crimes committed in ſociety do not immediately affect the governor, nor are they puniſhed as levelled at *him*; and you very well know that no crime whatever can affect the governor of the world. He is not the leſs happy for our vices, nor the more happy for our virtues. But crimes are therefore puniſhed, becauſe public good requires it. In all ſuppoſable caſes, public good is, or ought to be the reaſon and rule of puniſhment. Juſtice, therefore, far from being incompatible with goodneſs, is a neceſſary act of it, both to the offender and the public. This ſeems to be the only method

which

which nature has pointed out of vindicating the honour of laws and government, whether human or divine; but how the honour of either can be ſecured by the puniſhment of a virtuous being, and perfectly innocent of every crime (if ſuch a ſoleciſm will be allowed) is to me quite incomprehenſible.

You tell me the laws of God require perfect obedience, which if a man falls ſhort of, he muſt ſubmit to the penalty, whatever that penalty be. I grant it. All laws require perfect obedience; elſe they would be good for nothing. But notwithſtanding this, you do not, I hope, ſuppoſe that the laws of the Almighty, like thoſe of *Draco*, are all written in blood. Has not every governor and lawgiver a power to remit the penalty, either in whole or in part, as he ſees will be moſt conducive to public good? Undoubtedly. Has not this, in fact, been the caſe, under every diſpenſation of religion? Surely there is room for mercy under the government of a merciful God. To ſay that every the leaſt error in moral life deſerves eternal torments, is a hard ſaying, and who can bear it.

Whatever neceſſity there may be for puniſhing licentious and incorrigible characters, there cannot be the ſame neceſſity for puniſhing penitent and reformed ones. Nor is the ſupreme being under any neceſſity of *nature* to puniſh or reward, but is determined by wiſdom and goodneſs, and a regard to the welfare of that great empire of which he is the creator and governor. Were he under a *neceſſity of nature* to puniſh, neither repentance nor a ſuppoſed ſatisfaction would ſignify any thing at all. Were this the caſe, the ſtate we are now in, and paſſing through, could not poſſibly be one of diſcipline and probation. There would be no opportunity, nor any room left for improvement. It could not, therefore, be to ſatisfy the juſtice of God that Chriſt died; for law and juſtice require no ſuch ſatisfaction, nor can they, indeed, admit of it.

Should it be aſked how, or in what circumſtances, this *ſatisfaction* operates for the relief of ſinners? Would it be a proper anſwer to ſay, that it removes the natural or appointed conſequences of vice, as to this world, ſo as that neither ſhall take place?

place? That is falſe in fact, and confuted by the whole conſtitution of things here below. Would it be a juſter anſwer to ſay, that it removes all ill conſequences as to *hereafter?* This is contradicted alſo by the general ſtrain of the goſpel, which declares over and over, that men ſhall be there dealt with according to the reſpective merit or demerit of their characters, without any reference at all to a *Satisfaction*. Does it not then appear ſomewhat ſurprizing to you, that a ſatisfaction ſhould be made, and an infinite one too, and yet that ſinners ſhould not have the benefit of it, either here or hereafter? Even upon the Calviniſtic ſcheme, though the ſatisfaction is allowed to be infinite, I do not find that above one hundreth part of the human race, if ſo many, receive any benefit at all from it. For a vaſt majority are decreed to deſcend *ad ima Barathri*.

And it ſeems ſtill more incomprehenſible, how a ſatisfaction ſhould be infinite, without ſuppoſing more infinite beings than one, and that an infinite being is capable of ſuffering. No, ſays a *Calviniſt*, this is not a juſt repreſentation of the caſe.

Pray, good ſir, repreſent it then in your own way. Let us hear how the caſe really ſtands. "The caſe is thus: Chriſt ſuf-"fered or was puniſhed as *man*, though he "was and is ſtill really *God-man*." Well, but even on this ſuppoſition, the abſurdity ſtill remains; for I do not ſee how *God-man*, as conſtituting one perſon, could ſuffer. I have no idea of an *Angel-man* ſuffering either the miſeries of life or the pains of death, much leſs of a *God-man* ſuffering, and think it looks like an impoſſibility. But, ſays the Calviniſt, he emptied himſelf when he ſuffered, εαυτον εκενωσε. Emptied himſelf, of what? of his proper deity? Emptied himſelf of what could give his ſatisfaction its only value and importance? Abſurd ſtill. I ſhall conclude this letter in the words of a noble author, "That "it ſeemed to little purpoſe for God to "create a world that would coſt him ſo "dear the mending, and make him a ſuf-"ferer for his own work."

I am, yours.

LETTER

LETTER V.

SIR,

BUT I ſhall ſuppoſe him a *mere man*, which I think is the ſcripture idea of him, and by which the ſcheme of ſatisfaction will be ſomewhat leſs embarraſſed, and would aſk, How it is poſſible, even on this principle, that one being ſhould be puniſhed for another, without his guilt? for this always enters into the idea of *puniſhment*, which is not barely *ſuffering*, but ſuffering for immoral behaviour. He could not therefore be our *ſubſtitute*, or ſatisfy juſtice in our room, but upon the ſuppoſition of a transfer of guilt, which I think is one of the wildeſt ſuppoſitions that was ever made. Beſides, is ſuffering of itſelf any compenſation? Could the moſt exquiſite torments, of the moſt perfectly virtuous being that ever belonged to our world, a being too *approved of God*, give any pleaſure to the Almighty, or be any inducement with him to forgive his offending creatures? Surely you do not imagine that the honour of divine govern-

ment can be vindicated by puniſhing the innocent in the room of the guilty! *That the righteous be as the wicked, that be far from God!* And yet, upon this ſcheme, the righteous are not even upon a level with the wicked, but in a much worſe ſituation; for they are puniſhed, while the wicked eſcape; and, which is ſtill more ſurprizing, in this way only, it is pretended, that the honour of divine laws and government can be ſecured. Now, ſo far am I from thinking ſo, that I ſcruple not, on the other hand, to affirm concerning a government that purſues ſuch meaſures, and adopts ſuch maxims, that it is approaching as faſt as poſſible to its diſſolution.

Better it is that many guilty ſhould eſcape, than that one innocent perſon ſhould be puniſhed; and yet, in the caſe under conſideration, the innocent, and the *innocent only*, becomes the victim. By ſuch a procedure the ends of government, ſo far from being ſecured, will be moſt effectually defeated, and all poſſible encouragement given to vice; juſt the very reverſe of what is, in fact, the caſe under the government of God. And though much has

has been ſaid about ſeeing *the evil of ſin* in the death of Chriſt, which I ſuppoſe has been ſaid with a view to juſtify a certain notion of ſatisfaction, I muſt own I could never yet ſee *that evil* in the light of his being a victim to the juſtice of God. Where the innocent and virtuous ſubjects are doomed to the ſame gibbets and ſcaffolds on which the guilty ſhould ſuffer, and this too by the appointment of the ſupreme governor, one may there ſee the evil and danger of *tyranny*, if you pleaſe, but of nothing elſe that I know.

The object of divine government, according to the juſteſt ideas we can form of it, is the virtue and happineſs of the moral world; but how thoſe can be ſecured or eſtabliſhed by *vicarious obedience*, or *vicarious puniſhment*, I pretend not to underſtand. I rather think the doctrine I am endeavouring to confute gives encouragement, if not a ſanction to iniquity; for, allowing that a full and adequate ſatisfaction is made for the ſins of mankind by the puniſhment of Chriſt, as their *ſubſtitute*, their claim to favour, whether penitent or not penitent, ſeems not to be ill founded.

founded. Where a debt is fully diſcharged by a ſurety, or one who bound himſelf to the diſcharge of it, the creditor can have no farther demands on that ſcore. And if all guilt be cancelled and ſatisfied for by the interpoſition of Chriſt, what can be an obſtruction to the ſinners releaſe, not only from miſery, but even from moral obligation? What prepoſterous and wicked pains have ſome been at, and ſtill take, to make the goſpel of Chriſt appear in the light of a *popiſh indulgence!* In oppoſition to all this rhapſody of nonſenſe and blaſphemy in conjunction, the founder of the chriſtian ſcheme declared, that he came not to make any alteration in the moral ſyſtem of the univerſe; he came not to deſtroy any of God's eternal laws, or relax their obligation; and if ſo, the conſequences of vice, with regard to the actors, cannot be removed, at leaſt as to this world, by any *ſuch ſatisfaction*; and as to another, the ſame divine leader has declared that *penitence only* can remove them. Hence it is evident, that his ſacrifice was no ſatisfaction for ſin, and that no other ſatisfaction is required, but the reformation of the ſinner.

Shall

Shall it be ſaid that the death of Chriſt gave repentance its efficacy to blot out ſin? Neither does this appear to be the doctrine of the New Teſtament, though many reſpectable names have appeared in its ſupport. It is clogged with the ſame difficulty of ſuppoſing the divine mind under the influence of conſiderations and motives foreign to the *real character*, and with which they are intirely unconnected.

I am, yours.

LETTER VI.

SIR,

VICARIOUS puniſhment and vicarious virtue, which make ſo pompous a figure in certain theological ſyſtems, are things impoſſible in their own nature. They deſtroy all our ideas of right and wrong, and introduce confuſion and anarchy into the ſyſtem of the moral univerſe. I ſay impoſſible; for though *debts* of a civil nature may be transferred, and frequently

frequently are transferred, without injury to individuals or the community: I do not ſee how *moral character* can be thus transferred. Crimes that infer the loſs of life or liberty, cannot be thus ſatisfied for in the eye of the law. Where a crime is committed, which the law pronounces puniſhable by death or exile, it is by no means a matter of indifference who ſhall ſuffer, he that did the crime, or he that is innocent of it; but the *guilty* muſt be puniſhed. Otherwiſe juſtice is not ſatisfied, but egregiouſly perverted. And it is as impoſſible that the guilt of one perſon ſhould be the guilt of another, as that three diſtinct numerical perſons ſhould be one and the ſame numerical perſon; which ſome, however, are weak enough to believe.

By what chymical proceſs, I deſire to know, can that ſubſtance which has not one particle of gold in it, ever be made into real gold? Have not all experiments of this kind hitherto been in vain? Have the various modes of compounding and decompounding matter produced any new ſubſtance, or made any thing what it was not before? In ſhort, is there, or can there be

be a real *tranſmutation* in the univerſe, except by the hand of him that formed it? And by what moral chymiſtry do you think it poſſible that the ſin of one man ſhould become the ſin of another who never was guilty of it, or the righteous character of one man be, or be thought to be the righteouſneſs of another? Does not ſuch an hypotheſis confound all our ideas, and deſtroy the very being of religion and morality? A good man, it is allowed, may ſuffer for a bad man, and not unfrequently does ſo. Such is the preſent conſtitution of things, that the innocent ſhares in the diſtreſſes of life, and even bears them for the guilty, and ſometimes both are involved in the ſame calamity, but he cannot be *puniſhed* in the room of the guilty, without ſuppoſing him capable of thoſe diſagreeable ſenſations which attend the guilty perſon, which is impoſſible.

But I do not remember it is any where ſaid in the New Teſtament that Chriſt was puniſhed for ſinners, or that he died *in their ſtead.* Conſequently his ſufferings and death, how grievous ſoever, or however meritorious, can never be conſidered

as the ground or reaſon of befriending a ſinful world. The blood of Chriſt can in no other way attone for ſin, than as it is a means of deſtroying its empire and dominion. Will an offended deity be rendered placable by the blood of his well beloved ſon? No, He delighteth not in the death of the guilty, much leſs that of the innocent. Can a manifeſt act of injuſtice (for ſuch I conſider the puniſhment of the innocent) ever be the means of conciliating *his* favour, who loveth righteouſneſs and hateth oppreſſion?

I ſee a manifeſt propriety in the *ſufferings* of an innocent and good being to bring about the nobleſt purpoſes of providence, but none at all upon the ſcheme of ſatisfaction. The annexing this idea to the death of Chriſt has, I think, on the other hand, an unfriendly aſpect on religion and morals, and makes the end for which he came into the world very little, if at all attended to. It is, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, *a luſcious doctrine*, which the mobility are exceedingly fond of; and no wonder, indeed, they ſhould, for it permits them to gratify their ſenſual paſſions, at the

the ſame time that it flatters their heavenly hopes. How oft have you and I heard its devotees reaſon in this manner, " If Chriſt " ſuffered for us, and in our room, and " alſo obeyed the law of God for us (both " which we believe he did) we do not " ſee the propriety of our doing any thing, " or of paying the leaſt attention to goſ- " pel injunctions, as rules of life. A car- " nal unelected world may regard them, " as they pleaſe, but we think ourſelves " happy in being delivered from them;" and who can ſay that they reaſoned wrong? Upon their own principles, I do not ſee where their reaſoning is defective, and I ſhould not be much ſurprized to find their actions and conduct in real life correſponding to their avowed principles.

I do not know any doctrine of revealed religion on which authors, even of more liberal and enlarged thoughts, have written and diſcourſed with leſs perſpicuity and preciſion than the redemption of Chriſt. I could give many inſtances, were it needful. They had, I ſuppoſe, got *ſyſtems* into their heads in the early period of life, from which they could never afterwards intirely

intirely emancipate themſelves. Hence their dark, perplexed, and often unintelligible manner of treating it, and which, I am afraid, has too much encouraged ill diſpoſed and licentious minds to build falſe and groundleſs hopes upon. But as I ſhall have occaſion hereafter to enlarge on this topic, when I come to conſider the tendency and conſequences of this popular ſcheme, I would not detain you longer at preſent.

Wiſhing your progreſs in valuable learning, and in every liberal temper and character. I remain, yours.

LETTER VII.

SIR,

I DO not find that the chriſtian ſcheme has made any alteration at all in the moral ſyſtem of the univerſe. Things go on here in the ſame regular courſe. Virtue and vice have their reſpective conſequences as to this world, and are not at all

all affected by the coming of Chriſt. He had it not in his commiſſion to change the nature of things, or to make that virtue or vice which was not ſo before. So far was the chriſtian lawgiver from relaxing the obligations of virtue, that he has, in fact, given them additional force and authority. For, over and above the natural conſequences ariſing out of each, we are by him aſſured, that their reſpective effects ſhall alſo take place beyond the grave. Conſequently, we have a motive to univerſal virtue under his diſpenſation which we had not before; and this I beg leave to call the *poſitive* ſanction of religion. And, indeed, ſtrictly ſpeaking, there is nothing *new* in the chriſtian ſyſtem, beſides the motives to virtue there exhibited. Nothing is made an eſſential duty there that was not ſuch before. There are, indeed, ſome poſitive duties ariſing from the relation we ſtand in to Chriſt, ſuch as praying in his name, perpetuating the remembrance of his death, &c. but theſe derive all their value and importance from their moral tendency, and are inſignificant without it. And if the moral ſyſtem be the ſame in the kingdom of Chriſt, and our moral feelings

the ſame, it is evident there can be no ſuch thing as a transfer of ſin and righteouſneſs. No one can either be puniſhed or rewarded for another, for both ariſe out of the *perſonal* character, and are inſeparable from it. In ſhort, the conſtitution of nature and providence is a ſtanding confutation of this wonderful *ſatisfying ſcheme*.

And to me it ſeems amazing that a doctrine of ſuch reputed importance, and of ſo extraordinary a nature, ſhould not be clearly and expreſsly taught in the New Teſtament; whereas there is not a ſingle text in all that book, as far as I can remember, that can, by any rules of juſt and ſober criticiſm, be retained in ſupport of it. There are only two that ſeem to look that way, viz. Matt. xx. 28. λυτρον αντι πολλων 1 Tim. ii. 6. αντιλυτρον *he gave his life a ranſom for many. He gave himſelf a ranſom for all*; not *in the room* of many, or in the room of all, as their *ſubſtitute*. No ſuch thing. For, beſides that the words admit of a very different conſtruction, the phraſe of giving life for life could not have been underſtood by a diſciple of Moſes, or one brought up in the profeſſion of Judaiſm,

as

as our Lord's immediate followers were. A Jew had no idea of a beaſt's being puniſhed in the room of a man, knew nothing at all of a transfer of puniſhment from the offender to the victim; for it was incapable of puniſhment, being no ſubject of moral government. But of this more hereafter. At preſent I would obſerve that the prepoſition ανλι ſeems properly rendered by our tranſlators, *for*, or *on account of*. He gave himſelf or died *gratia multorum*, for the benefit, or good of mankind. This gives a ſound ſenſe to the words, and conveys I think the true idea of his death. Thus the prepoſition is rendered in many other places, particularly Heb. xii. 2. *He endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, on account of the joy ſet before him* ανλι της προκειμενης χαρας.

The words λυτρον and λυτρωτης, as applied to Chriſt, are metaphorical, and very probably allude to the cuſtom of redeeming ſlaves or captives taken in war. A price was paid down, and they either recovered their liberty, or became the property of another maſter. Analogous to this, chriſtians are ſaid to be *bought with a price*, and

redeemed not with ſilver and gold, but with the *blood of Chriſt*. His blood, in a lax way of ſpeaking, is called the price of our redemption, in as much as his endeavours to reform the world coſt him his life.

Redemption, in the ſcripture ſtyle, as you well know, ſignifies in general *a deliverance*, without any regard to price; thus, to mention no more, Exod. vi. 6. *I will redeem you* (Iſrael) *with a ſtretched out arm*. Here there was no price ſtipulated or paid. Had there been any, it muſt have been paid to the King of Egypt, who detained them as captives. By repreſenting the blood of Chriſt as the price of our redemption, the apoſtle means neither more nor leſs than that the love of God in him to us ward was great and diſtinguiſhed. Not that his blood was *the price* without which he would not ſhew mercy to a ſinful world; for he delighteth not in blood, much leſs in the blood of his own ſon. Not that his blood was an *equivalent* for the ſins of men; for upon that hypotheſis their pardon had not been an act of grace, but of juſtice, the very reverſe of what the ſcriptures always declare.

Metaphors

Metaphors and alluſions are by no means to be tortured, and ſtretched beyond the particular point they are deſigned to illuſtrate; much leſs is every thing affirmed of Chriſt to be underſtood literally. It is enough for the writers purpoſe, if there is but a likeneſs in one material circumſtance. Our being bought with *a price*, and Chriſt's being our *ranſom*, when diveſted of figure, mean no more than a *remarkable deliverance*. The New Teſtament, as well as the Old, every where abounds with figurative repreſentations, bold and ſtriking alluſions; but figure and alluſion, one would think, are a very improper baſis to erect a religious ſyſtem upon; and yet this ſeems to be the only ſupport of Calviniſtic tenets that are peculiarly ſuch.

I am, yours.

LETTER VIII.

SIR,

IN my laſt I obſerved the very great impropriety of building a doctrine upon metaphors; concerning which I would now farther obſerve, that they do not a-

gree in every point with the thing repreſented by them. Language, being originally expreſſive of ſenſible qualities, can no otherwiſe expreſs moral ideas than by metaphor; which ſome not attending to, have made ſtrange work in the ſcience of theology. Let us, if you pleaſe, purſue the reſemblance between a temporal and moral deliverance as far as it will go, the better to illuſtrate what I am upon. *A proper redemption* ſuppoſes a captive or ſlave, a power or perſon to whom he is captive, then the ranſomer or redeemer, and laſtly the price paid for his liberty. By applying theſe particulars to the redemption of Chriſt, you will eaſily ſee that the parallel holds only with regard to one material circumſtance, or a *ſimple deliverance*. Mankind, in this redemption, are ſuppoſed to be the captives, groaning under a wretched ſlavery, which, they had unhappily involved themſelves in. The perſons detaining them in captivity are not *real* but *figurative perſons*, ſuch as idolatry, ſuperſtition, and vice. Out of this wretched ſtate they are redeemed into a ſtate of freedom. The ranſomer is God Almighty, by the mediation and inſtrumentality of his

ſon

ſon Jeſus. You already, I dare ſay, perceive that the parallel muſt be limited to one ſingle circumſtance, beyond which if we attempt to ſtretch it, it will loſe all its force, beauty, and propriety.

In this moral redemption, God Almighty acted the part of a merciful and indulgent parent to his offending offspring, inſiſting on no equivalent or ſatisfaction on their part, other than a return to their duty and future amendment of character; much leſs did he inſiſt that a ſurety ſhould by way of atoning for their ſins, ſubmit to his wrath and curſe and the pains of hell; No, nothing of this kind. Here, therefore, the parallel muſt break off, elſe we ſhall fall into very great abſurdities; *v. g.* If it is inſiſted on, that a real ſatisfaction was made, a real price paid, as the patrons of orthodoxy would have it, will not this be a conſiderable draw back on the love of God the Father, whom it repreſents as not over friendly to his creatures.

Admitting, however, for argument ſake, that in the affair of our moral redemption, a real price, or *equivalent*, was given. To

whom, I beſeech you, was it paid? Was it paid to ſin, ſuperſtition, and idolatry, to which mankind were in bondage? No one will aſſert this, that means to ſpeak with propriety. Was it paid to the *devil*, whoſe captives and vaſſals they were reputed to have long been? No. And yet this opinion, ridiculous and ſhocking as it ſeems, was maintained by a celebrated Biſhop of Milan, St. *Ambroſe* by name. Or rather, was the ranſom paid to God the Father, againſt whom the offence was committed? ſurely not. For God of his great mercy gave the ranſom, and ſo *loved the world, as to ſend his only begotten ſon into it*. To ſay that Chriſt ſatisfied the juſtice of God at the ſame time that the ſatisfaction was of God's own procuring, is, in my humble opinion, fairly giving up the point. It is the very ſame as ſaying, that a perſon who owes you a large ſum diſcharges the debt by money given him out of your own pocket. This looks like forgiving the debt, but can never be called a legal diſcharge of it. Is the debtor any more an object of favour after this *ideal ſatisfaction* than he was before?

By

By running parallels therefore too far, and ſtretching alluſions beyond the particular point the writer had in view, we debaſe the religion of Jeſus, and lay it open to the attacks of infidelity. Should a writer take it into his head to aſſert *tranſubſtantiation* to be the doctrine of the New Teſtament, and that Chriſt's diſciples eat his real body, upon the authority of theſe words, *This is my body*, what anſwer could a *Calviniſt* give, that would not, at the ſame time, overthrow his own notion of ranſom and ſatisfaction?

Various are the images under which Chriſt is exhibited by the New Teſtament writers; ſuch as a *door*, a *lamb*, a *huſband*, a *paſſover*, a *ſhepherd*, a *vine*, a *corner ſtone*, a *living ſtone*, a *ſower*, *bread*, *mercy-ſeat*, *propitiation*, a *curſe*, a *ſacrifice*. What are we to infer from all this variety of phraſe? that he really was what thoſe words expreſs? that Chriſt was in fact every thing that he is compared to? ridiculous!

I doubt not but all thoſe alluſions had a particular beauty and propriety, though the force of ſome of them may be loſt at this

this diſtance, for want of knowing the particular cuſtoms, phraſeology, and manners of oriental nations. There is, alſo, great danger of confounding the original meaning of words, with their metaphorical uſe and acceptation. To an aſſociation of this kind, we owe ſome doctrines that I verily believe the ſacred writers never meant to give a ſanction to, particularly *that* which is the ſubject of theſe papers. The ſacrifice of Chriſt, in the Calviniſtic ſenſe of it, ſeems not to have any other or better foundation, though it is made the very baſis of *ſyſtematic theology*. Becauſe the principal part of the national religion of Judea conſiſted in *corporeal ſacrifices*, therefore the evangelical writers, to whom the ſtyle, language, and ideas of the Jews were familiar, love to expreſs the various duties of religion and piety by that word. The death of Chriſt in particular is ſtiled a *ſacrifice*, not becauſe it was truly and properly ſuch, in the Jewiſh ſenſe of ſacrifices; but becauſe it was a diſtinguiſhed expreſſion of his regard to God. Hence alſo other moral virtues, ſuch as *praiſe*, and *thankſgiving*, *doing good*, *and communicating* are called by that name. In ſhort, as the New Teſtament ſacrifices are all ſpiritual and moral ones, that of Chriſt muſt be ſo too.

Conformable

Conformable to theſe ſentiments, Chriſt, as he devoted his life to God, and to the cauſe of virtue, is introduced by the prophet as declaring this to be the only ſacrifice acceptable in his ſight, Heb. x. 5—8. *Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he ſaith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldſt not; in burnt offerings and ſacrifice for ſin thou haſt had no pleaſure. Then ſaid I, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.* Theſe laſt words give us, I think, the true idea of Chriſt's ſacrifice, as conſiſting in a devotedneſs to God, and in a diſpoſition to do and to ſuffer his will. In this ſenſe, if you pleaſe, he may be ſtyled a ſacrifice; and indeed it is the only ſenſe in which he can properly be called ſo; but where he is exhibited under Moſaic or Levitical images, ſuch as *paſchal lamb*, *propitiation*, and the like, it is plain that the writers uſe the figurative ſtyle; from which, therefore, no argument can be drawn in ſupport of a real and proper ſacrifice. For had he offered himſelf, in the Jewiſh ſenſe of ſacrifice, that is the literal and original ſenſe of it, he muſt have incurred the guilt of offering to God a human one, of all others the moſt offenſive in his ſight. To found

a doctrine upon figurative and rhetorical language, which the ſacred writers abound in, is the moſt palpable perverſion of ſpeech that can well be conceived.

I am, yours.

LETTER IX.

SIR,

WHAT ſeems to perplex you moſt is, the ſacrifical language of the New Teſtament, in which the writers have deſcribed the author of our faith, ſuch as *propitiation*, *propitiatory*, *atonement*, and other ſacrifical terms, that ſeem to imply ſomething like *compenſation* in the redemption of our Lord.

The New Teſtament phraſeology has, I own, a good deal miſled the multitude, and perhaps others of better education; nor can they tell how to explain it but upon the hypotheſis of a ſatisfaction made by him to the juſtice of God his father. It is evident, however, from what has been already

already ſaid, and ſhall hereafter be ſuggeſted, that it can have no ſuch meaning. I do not deny but the words ιλασμος, and ιλασκομαι, may ſignify in profane authors to *placate*, or render one propitious; but if I ſhould grant you, that this is their general meaning as uſed by *them*, it will not follow that the ſacred writers, though they uſe the ſame words, affix to them the ſame ideas. To explain biblical phraſes by like words borrowed from claſſical writers, is not the way to come at their true ſenſe and meaning. And though ſome critics and philologiſts of character have adopted this rule of interpretation, it is unqueſtionably a moſt fallacious one, and has in truth darkened the ſubject which they meant to illuſtrate. In order to throw light upon the ſcriptures, we muſt attend not to the ideas which Heathen poets and hiſtorians affix to certain forms and modes of ſpeech, but only to the ideas which the Jews annexed to them, who were ſtrangers moſt of them, to Pagan authors, and Pagan ſentiments.

The greek word ιλασμος, and the Hebrew one of which it is a tranſlation, are never uſed

uſed by the ſacred writers in the ſenſe of *rendering God propitious*; and therefore when Chriſt is called our *propitiation*, the meaning cannot be that he ſuffered and died as our *ſubſtitute*. For *compenſation*, or *equivalent*, entered not into the idea of a propitiatory ſacrifice; nor does the Moſaic hiſtory and ritual ever countenance ſuch a notion; and the prophets, who muſt be ſuppoſed to underſtand perfectly the religious inſtitution of their country, always declare againſt it.

Atonement, I will allow, was made by the death of an animal, but you muſt not therefore infer that it was ſlain in the room of the offender. And though I may not be able to aſſign the preciſe notion of atonement, what it was, wherein it conſiſted, and what was the end and deſign of it, I think I am pretty ſure what it was *not*. It did by no means expreſs or imply a *ſubſtitution*, or that the life of the animal was taken in the room of the delinquent; becauſe, in ſome caſes, atonement was made where no beaſt was ſlain, as in the caſe of a poor man, Levit. v; from whom a ſmall quantity of flour was accepted as an atonement

for

for his ſin. Here was remiſſion without ſhedding of blood. Atonement was alſo required and made in a caſe where there was actually no crime at all, either moral or political, as in the caſe of a woman after child birth. She brought her ſacrifice, and the prieſt made atonement for her. Levit. xii.

More remarkable ſtill is the affair of the *Scape-goat*, over which the prieſt confeſſed the ſins of the people, and the goat *bore them away to a land not inhabited.* Here you find the ſins of a whole nation forgiven not only without blood, but without any ſacrifice at all. Theſe circumſtances prove, I think, to a demonſtration, that vicarious puniſhment entered not into the idea which the Jews had of atonement.

Beſides, ſacrifices were generally appointed and offered, not for deliberate immoralities, which they could by no means expiate; but for what the apoſtle calls αγνοημαλα, ſins of ignorance, inadvertency, inattention to the requirements of *poſitive law*, which the Jewiſh conſtitution did not make capital; and if ſo, the life of the

the ſacrifical animal could not be taken for the offerer's life, becauſe the law did not ſubject him to death; ſo that his ſacrifice could be no atonement at all, in the modern ſenſe of atonement. From all which it is evident, that Chriſt's being called our *propitiation*, is only in the alluſive way, and that he could in no other ſenſe be an atonement, than that of declaring God's gracious purpoſe of *paſſing over* the ſins of men, on the condition of their future repentance. Not that what he did and ſuffered *procured* that mercy, but were only *declarative* of it. Propitiatory ſacrifices I conſider as *public certifications*, that the offerers were either deſirous of being reſtored, or actually were reſtored to the privileges of citizens, not by virtue of the ſacrifice which they offered, but of the penitent diſpoſition accompanying that ſacrifice. So Chriſt is our *propitiation*, declaring us in a ſtate of favour with God, as governor of the world, not in virtue of what he ſuffered, but on condition only of our renewed obedience.

I am, yours.

LETTER

LETTER X.

SIR,

THERE remains only to be explained the word *propitiatory*, or *mercy seat*, as Christ is called Rom. iii, 25. This image under which he is represented carries our thoughts back to the mercy seat among the Jews, which we find described in Exod. xxv. It was set over, or covered the ark, where a copy of the law was deposited with a winged boy at each end, facing each other, and the purport of it we have in the following words: *There, says God to Moses, will I meet with thee, and commune with thee, of all things that I will give thee in charge to the children of Israel.*

Hence it appears the mercy-seat was the place or station whence God declared his mind to the Jews by Moses; and hence the propriety of Christ's being compared to a mercy-seat, as God did by him pub-

liſh his will to the univerſe in general. The alluſion ſeems beautiful and ſignificant, and conveys the idea of a divine commiſſion to reveal the counſels of heaven, and tranſact affairs of the greateſt moment on our behalf.

The only ſacrifical term applied to Chriſt in the New Teſtament, of which I have taken no notice, is atonement, which is only once mentioned there, and ought to have been tranſlated as it is in other places RECONCILIATION, *per quem reconciliationem ſumus aſſequuti*, i. e. by him we are favoured with the comfortable declaration that repentance will reinſtate us in the divine favour. And what could offending creatures deſire more? or what more powerful inducement can they have to reform their lives? In this light the redemption of Jeſus is of peculiar force and efficacy, and in this light, of an inforcement to virtue, do the ſacred penmen always conſider and ſpeak of it; whereas, conſidered in the light of *a compleat ſatisfaction to the juſtice of God*, which is the modern way of conſidering it, the motive to virtue is entirely deſtroyed. For what occaſion

occaſion for repentance and amendment on this ſcheme? None at all. Is it indeed proper we ſhould repent, as all demerit is already cancelled by the interpoſition of another? Upon this ſcheme, which is ſtrangely abſurd, and yet ſtrangely prevailing, the religion of Chriſt would evidently ſuperſede the religion of nature, inſtead of being any improvement of it, or inforcement to it.

Surpriſing therefore it is, that ſuch a notion of Chriſt's redemption ſhould ever have entered into the minds of men, and more ſurpriſing ſtill, that it ſhould have ſtood ſo long unexpunged in all public formularies. Moſt of our eſtabliſhed creeds run in one and the ſame ſtrain, and the doctrine of *ſatisfaction*, abſurd and unſcriptural as it is, ſeems a leading idea in them all.

But aſſure yourſelf, ſir, that the New Teſtament contains no ſuch doctrine. I ſhould be the laſt man to undertake the vindication of it, if it did: How much ſoever, I now venerate the character of Jeſus, and admire a religious ſyſtem every way ſo worthy of him, and friendly to his

followers, I muſt freely own to you, that were the doctrine of *ſatisfaction and imputed righteouſneſs* any part of it, I could neither ſee beauty in the one, nor utility in the other. Whatever charms it might have for the *viſionary* and *licentious*, no ſober or ſenſible man would ever become its Apologiſt.

Whereas the doctrine there taught, is as diſtant from any thing of this kind as the Weſt is from the riſing ſun. The redemption of the world is there repreſented as taking its riſe from the love of God, his boundleſs love to human kind, his love and regard for them in their low eſtate. Mankind are there conſidered (what, in truth, they were before ſupernatural light aroſe upon them) as in a ſtate of great depravity and alienation from God, ſunk in ignorance, vice, and ſuperſtition. In ſuch a ſtate, it is natural to ſuppoſe them very much at a loſs as to the terms of their acceptance with God, doubtful as to a future happy exiſtence, and equally doubtful as to any future exiſtence at all; for I do not ſee what arguments, clear and convincing, can be advanced in proof of a future

ture ſtate, independent of revelation. In this ſtate of ignorance and wretchedneſs, it pleaſed the ſupreme maker and ruler of all, to viſit mankind with ſalvation; to ſend his ſon to redeem them from vice to virtue, to make thoſe diſcoveries of his nature and character, and of the extent of moral obligation, which are the foundation of acceptable religion, and to inſure pardon to penitent characters, and immortality beyond death and the grave, which are its beſt ſupport. His own eſſential goodneſs, not the ſufferings and obedience of his ſon, diſpoſed him to befriend a ſinful world; for though both were highly acceptable to him, yet ſhedding his blood, as *ſuch*, could have nothing acceptable or propitiating in it, any more than the blood of ſacrifical animals, which is declared, over and over, to be of no moment; and therefore could be no inducement to forgive offending creatures. *To be juſtified by his blood*, means our being juſtified upon the terms of that new and better covenant, of which his blood or death is conſidered as the ratification. Thus the Moſaic covenant was ratified with blood, which was ſprinkled upon the people, in teſtimony of

their reſolution to regard what God had enjoined; in alluſion to which Peter mentions *ſprinkling the blood of Jeſus.*

It cannot be ſuppoſed the Jews were ſo ſtupid as to believe that the bleſſings of the covenant were inſured to them by the blood that ratified it. No. Thoſe, they well knew, depended upon their own obedience; and therefore it is added, *All the words which the Lord hath ſpoken we will do.*

Though it be expreſsly ſaid, that we are *reconciled to God by the death of his ſon*, yet it is no where ſaid that *his death* reconciled God to us; nor is it any where ſaid, that the ſhedding of Chriſt's blood was a circumſtance without which God would not forgive ſin; for he was diſpoſed to forgive it previous to the ſhedding of that blood. But he choſe in this way, rather than in any other, to diſplay his gracious regards; becauſe in this way the intereſts of religion and virtue ſeem beſt conſulted, and moſt likely to be ſecured. A deliverance from ſin being the great object of the chriſtian ſcheme, the life, doctrine, death, and

and reſurrection of its author have a peculiar propriety to bring about that deſirable end, and are ſuch motives to virtue, as no other religious ſyſtem ever contained. Such an authentic declaration as we have, that repentance ſhall blot out paſt tranſgreſſions, and render us proper objects of final and everlaſting mercy, is, in fact, the diſtinguiſhing glory of the goſpel ſyſtem. And what could creatures deſire more? What ſcheme can one imagine to be more worthy of God than one that is calculated, as this is, to aboliſh the dominion of vice, and to eſtabliſh in its room the empire of religion and virtue? The nobleſt propitiation for ſin is to turn men from it, and bring them back to glory and virtue. Similar to this is that beautiful ſentiment of the ſon of *Sirach* xxxv. 3. *To depart from wickedneſs is a thing pleaſing to the Lord, and to forſake unrighteouſneſs is* a PROPITIATION, εξιλασμος.

Hence it is evident what notion the latter Jews, at leaſt, had of propitiation, and that they conſidered that and repentance as perfectly ſynonimous.

I am, yours.

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I am, yours.

LETTER XI.

SIR,

BY this time, I hope, moſt of your ſcruples with regard to *atonement* are got over, eſpecially that great ſtumbling-block, as you juſtly call it, of *vicarious puniſhment*. Though in your laſt, you ſeem to intimate a ſuſpicion that the New Teſtament phraſeology, of Chriſt's *giving himſelf* for us, *dying for us*, *ſhedding his blood for us*, *dying for our offences*, *bearing our ſins*, and the like, may imply ſomething more than barely ſuffering in the cauſe of virtue and mankind, I muſt own I cannot ſee any ground for that ſuſpicion. As it was the gracious purpoſe and plan of providence to enlighten and reform the world, our Saviour appeared in it with no other view but to execute that plan. In purſuance of which, many ſcenes of adverſity, and trials of various kinds, were neceſſary to be gone through; in all which he exemplified

exemplified the greateſt fortitude and intrepidity. In the ſituation he was in, he could not poſſibly have avoided the ſufferings he went through, and ſubmitted to, conſiſtently with his profeſſed deſign of promoting the moral happineſs and welfare of mankind. Suffering in ſuch circumſtances, as it gives us the higheſt idea of the ſufferer, is alſo the nobleſt recommendation of religion and virtue. It argued the moſt undiſſembled love of goodneſs, to bear what he did, not only without murmuring, but with perfect acquieſcence.

All thoſe phraſes, therefore, of *dying for us, giving himſelf a ranſom*, &c. expreſs his great benevolence and affection for the human race; and they neither expreſs nor imply more. He ſuffered for us υπερ ημων *on our account*, and from a principle of the moſt diſintereſted regard. Shall it be ſaid that his ſuffering for us was *penal?* And why not alſo our ſuffering for him, which is expreſſed by the ſame phraſe, in ſeveral places, particularly Philip. i. 29. *For unto you it is given not only to believe in him, but alſo to ſuffer for his ſake,* υπερ αυτȣ πασχειν

Surely,

Surely, you cannot imagine this means their ſuffering in *his ſtead*, any more than his ſuffering in *theirs*. It denotes only their ſteady attachment to him, and adherence to his cauſe, under all poſſible diſcouragements. In like manner, Chriſt's dying for us was the ſtrongeſt poſſible mark of real and genuine regard, agreeable to what he himſelf ſays, *This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love than this hath no man, that one ſhould die for his friend; but in this God commendeth his love, in that, while ſinners, Chriſt died for us.* If a full ſatisfaction had been made to his juſtice, Chriſt's death had been no commendation of the Father's love at all, much leſs of his diſintereſted love.

The phraſes of ſuffering *for our ſins, bearing our ſins*, ſuggeſt the idea of his innocence, that he was free from guilt, and could not be charged with even the ſuſpicion of it; that it was not on account of *his own ſin* that he ſuffered, but merely through the malevolence, malice, and iniquity of others; that his innocence and virtue, however remarkable, could not protect

tect him from their virulence and outrage. In ſhort, that he fell a victim to the licentiouſneſs of the nation he belonged to, and the age he lived in, and not to any demerit of his own.

Caſes of this kind are not uncommon in the courſe of providence, nor is it any reflexion at all on providence, that they ſhould be permitted to exiſt. Innocent children ſuffer ſometimes, and are expoſed to want and miſery for the crimes of their parents. Whole families are not unfrequently involved in great diſtreſs through the indolence or diſſipation of one man. Though many are puniſhed for their own offences, not a few ſuffer for the faults of others, in which they had no ſhare. And here I muſt beg leave to borrow a paſſage from a book that lately fell into my hands, that fully expreſſes my meaning on the preſent ſubject, and I am ſure much better than I could do it myſelf. " It ſeems to have been an opinion generally prevailing in the world, that the calamities which befal men are the effects of ſome ſins committed by themſelves or others ; it appears however from the inſtance of the man born blind,

John

John ix. as well as from that of Job, that God may exerciſe his creatures with trials for other ends than the puniſhment of ſin. But this notion ſeems to have given riſe to certain modes of ſpeech proper to convey an opinion of the ſufferers character, and which perhaps had originally no farther deſign. This will help us to a right underſtanding of Iſaiah ch. liii, where we have a beautiful deſcription of ſuffering innocence, and ſee extraordinary merit ſtruggling beneath a load of mercileſs oppreſſion."

"Deſerted by friends, beſet with enemies, yet firm and unſhaken amidſt the ſtorms which burſt upon him, he appears before his accuſers in all the majeſty of conſcious virtue; ſilent becauſe he deſpiſed their malice, or foreſaw the inutility of a formal defence, where every art of falſhood was practiſed to deſtroy him. The prophet, in ſurpriſe to ſee the illuſtriouſly good man involved in ſuch deep diſtreſs, as if he had caſt about in vain to find ſome blemiſh in his character, to puniſh which providence permitted him to be thus afflicted, at length crys out, *Surely he hath born our griefs, and carried our ſorrows.* He could not have more

more ſtrongly expreſſed the perfect innocence of his life, and greatneſs of his ſufferings, than by the following ſtrokes, *He was wounded for our tranſgreſſions, he was bruiſed for our iniquities, the chaſtiſement of our peace was upon him, and by his ſtripes we are healed. All we like ſheep have gone aſtray, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* He was ſo free from the ſuſpicion of guilt, that his calamity muſt be charged to the offence of others; and ſo extraordinary were his ſufferings, for their number and greatneſs; that whereas the reſt of the nation had been very corrupt, it ſeemed as if God had laid on him the iniquity of them all. The phraſe of ſuffering for the ſins of men, as it neceſſarily implies innocence in the ſufferer, ſo it does not neceſſarily imply any thing farther."

The race of Jews born in Babylon might with great propriety ſay, *Our fathers have ſinned, and we have born their iniquity*, i. e. we ſuffer on their account. The ſame phraſe, Peter expreſſes our Lord's cruel and unjuſt ſufferings, by, *he bore our ſins in his own body on the tree*, that is, as the ſame author explains it, *Acts* ii. 23, he was by

wicked

wicked hands crucified and ſlain; and indeed the context in 1 Peter ii. 24. plainly requires this ſenſe of the words, and will admit of no other. For in no other ſenſe could he bear our ſins than in that of ſuffering innocently. God, if he had pleaſed, might have exempted him from the tragical ſcenes of life he paſſed through, have permitted him to die a natural death, and have raiſed him again from the dead; but in that caſe the world had loſt the benefit of his great and good example. Neither virtue nor vice would have appeared ſo much in their true colours. We ſhould not have been ſo much ſtruck with the deformity of the one, nor with the majeſty and glory of the other. *It became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many ſons into glory, to make the captain of their ſalvation perfect through ſufferings.* If this account of our redemption by Chriſt ſhall not be thought to come up to the full import of the ſcripture phraſeology, I ſhould be glad to ſee a better, and one liable to fewer objections.

I am, yours.

LETTER

LETTER XII.

SIR,

I Now proceed to the ſubject of your laſt inquiry, viz. the *tendency and conſequences* of the Calviniſtic ſcheme of atonement; and theſe, I truly think, are ſufficient to overthrow it, independent of all other arguments. The tendency of any doctrine, and the influence which it naturally has on the morals of mankind, are either its beſt recommendation, or its ſtrongeſt confutation. The point I have been conſidering, were it *merely ſpeculative*, would be worth no man's while to contend about; but ſince it is connected with morals, and operates upon the heart and life, perhaps more powerfully and fatally than any other religious opinion whatever, a true friend to chriſtianity and its author, can with no ſort of propriety ſtand neuter in the conteſt. The beſt and ſureſt criterion of religious principles is their moral influence;

fluence; this is our Saviour's own rule, *By their fruits ſhall ye know them*; the fruits which they have a tendency and fitneſs to produce.

Now, Sir, I appeal to you, who are no incompetent judge of the caſe, whether principles that lead to the neglect of duty, the violation of the moral law, or in any degree relax its obligation, are principles which a wiſe man would eſpouſe, or an honeſt man defend, even though they ſhould happen to be the principles of a great majority? For my own part, I think the doctrine of *Chriſt's atonement*, as explained by the ſchools, and believed by the bulk of profeſſed chriſtians, opens a wide gap for the introduction of ſuch evils into ſociety, as would ſoon ſap the foundations of it, were it not checked by better principles, of nature's planting. If a full ſatisfaction on the part of ſinners be made to all the demands of divine juſtice, I do not ſee what buſineſs you or I have with *moral obligation*, farther than we are bound by the laws of the community under which we live. The ſelf contradiction that appears upon the front of this ſcheme is, moreover,

moreover, ſuch as no arguments whatever can reconcile or remove. That a man ſhall be acceptable to God, not on account of his perſonal endeavours to pleaſe him! that he ſhall be conſidered as an object of divine favour, only for the righteouſneſs of another, which is incommunicable, and intransferrable, is certainly a very high ſtrain of myſticiſm! Thanks, however, are due to that gracious and benevolent hand, which hath erected in the human ſyſtem ſuch fences and barriers of virtue, as it is not in the power of ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm wholly to demoliſh. But for this a Calviniſt would be a conſiſtent being throughout, and form his practice upon his principles. And in that caſe, and on that ſuppoſition, I think we ſhould have full as much occaſion for gibbets as we have for churches.

The abettors of this doctrine, not much accuſtomed to argument, and knowing that reaſon is not in their intereſt, generally intrench themſelves behind the authority of *great numbers*, and *great names*, as if either could give a ſanction to glaring abſurdities. Accordingly, their boaſt is, that the doctrine

of *ſatisfaction* is conformable to the ſentiments of the primitive church, and of all modern proteſtant churches both at home and abroad. This kind of argumentation to me appears to be a little ſuſpicious, as no churches at preſent prefer a claim to infallibility, the moſt fallible excepted, I mean the church of Rome. Allowing, however, its conformity to the ſentiments of proteſtant creeds, though its conformity to thoſe of the primitive church for the firſt five centuries after the Apoſtles days is very problematical, if not altogether groundleſs; but allowing all this for argument's ſake, reaſon and ſcripture are ſurely more undoubted authorities, and yet to neither of theſe is it by any means conformable, but a manifeſt inſult upon both. No matter how many churches, or how many men concur in the ſupport of a doctrine, if it be not at the ſame time agreeable to the religion of Jeſus. *Their* authority, is *no* authority in matters of this nature; elſe we call ourſelves *Proteſtants* with very little propriety. Their authority, I do allow, may ſometimes be admitted in ſupport of *facts*, but I am far from thinking it adviſeable to reſt a point of *faith* upon

upon the ſame authority. Neither the *ancient fathers*, nor the *modern mothers* of the church are with me oracular.

To all this I foreſee it will be objected, that thoſe who hold the principles I have been animadverting upon, do, many of them, lead good lives; that the conſequences of their doctrines, which their adverſaries are weak enough to charge upon them, they do abſolutely diſclaim and diſavow. I know they do, at leaſt many of them do, though not all; but, nevertheleſs, ſuch conſequences ought reaſonably to make them ſuſpect the truth of their principles, becauſe they do *naturally* follow from them. Let not you and I be afraid of tracing a principle through all its conſequences, much leſs meanly ſurrender our underſtandings into the hands of thoſe who have perhaps an intereſt in miſleading us. How much ſoever I venerate the *holy order* in general, I believe I ſhall not be ſuſpected of treſpaſſing either upon truth or charity, when I affirm that many of that order degrade the character they wear, by their venal and mercenary diſpoſitions, by preaching doctrines to the people, which

themſelves do not believe in, and by applying *opiates* to their conſciences, inſtead of awakening them to a juſt ſenſe of moral obligation.

LETTER XIII.

SIR,

IT has been urged in favour of Calviniſm, that its votaries are more attentive to religious requirements, more ſober and devout than any other denomination whatever. This, however, I do very much ſuſpect the truth of. In point of external modes, and forms, the argument, I will allow, is in their favour. Theſe they are very tenacious of, and ſo far they merit our eſteem. In other reſpects, I am afraid, they will not appear to advantage upon the compariſon. That there are good men amongſt them, men of the ſtricteſt honour and integrity, I make not the leaſt doubt of; but, nevertheleſs, for this they ſeem indebted to better principles than their own

own peculiar ones. Their general character is known to be that of bigotry to their own modes and ſentiments, without any grains of charitable allowance for thoſe that differ from them. This μολυσμος πνευματος or *filthineſs of the ſpirit*, is what I greatly diſlike in any denomination. It is judging their brethren, judging the ſervants of another maſter, and judging them too before the time; and yet this monopolizing and unſociable ſpirit one ſees a great deal of in all their writings of the polemic-kind, and is what ſeaſons almoſt every diſcourſe of theirs from the pulpit. You remember what a ſevere cenſure a certain intolerant Divine paſſed upon Dr. *Tillotſon*, for being what he called *a legal preacher*, affirming that he knew no more of chriſtianity than the wild Indians. I could mention other venerable names, who, becauſe they could not come up to a certain pitch of orthodoxy, have had very indifferent quarters aſſigned them in the other world, how much ſoever their characters were irreproachable in this. To deny *original ſin*, or the *ſupreme deity of Chriſt*, are with them ſure marks of final reprobation, though neither of theſe articles has any

connection with God's eternal favour. This is not judging of opinion by *character*, but of character by *opinion*, which is certainly the moſt fallacious, not to ſay unſcriptural rule that ever was adopted. In ſhort, I have not diſcovered in any other denomination that I am acquainted with, a diſpoſition ſo dogmatically intolerant, and ſavouring ſo little of the mild and benevolent one of the goſpel. *Rational churchmen*, and *Rational diſſenters* (for both are alike the objects of their indignation) are ſeldom or ever ſpoke of but in terms of reproach; and if their power were but as little circumſcribed, as their tongues and pens, it is to be feared they would purſue the ſame ſanguinary meaſures with regard to both, which their founder and apoſtle JOHN CALVIN was not aſhamed to glory in.

It is farther urged in favour of *accepted orthodoxy*, that the old Puritans were all, to a man, *Solifidians*, and reſted their ſalvation upon the unfaſhionable doctrines of *ſatisfaction* and *imputed righteouſneſs*, and yet were remarkable for their piety and virtue. If I ſhould grant this, which I am very willing

willing to do, what is the inference? that their piety was owing to their peculiar tenets, *as ſuch?* By no means. They are certainly not calculated to produce any thing that is morally good. Their virtue was owing not to Calviniſtic opinions, but to the general principles of religion, aided by the peculiar complexion of the times they lived in. Do but view thoſe very Puritans in the times of the civil war, and of the *Protectorate* that followed, and I think you will not find much to admire in their principles. How favourable ſoever *Fanaticiſm* may be thought to civil liberty, it is well known that, in the ſucceeding reign, it ended in *deiſm*, and licentiouſneſs of manners, to which it naturally leads.

But the inſtance of the Puritans makes little for the purpoſe for which it is alledged. It proves only that ſome remain uncorrupted by the principles of the ſect to which they belong. There are, no doubt, many worthy characters in the worſt religious eſtabliſhment you can mention, on whom the ſuperſtitious and enthuſiaſtic principles of it have never practically operated; but theſe have always bore but a

ſmall proportion to the numbers that have been corrupted, who, thinking themſelves ſafe in their ſcrupulous attachment to religious modes and forms, have given themſelves over to the direction of their appetites, in all their unbounded licence.

Where certain atonements, of a corporal or pecuniary nature, or ſacerdotal abſolutions are provided, in caſes of delinquency, the virtuous principle muſt of courſe loſe much of its force and energy. It is natural to ſuppoſe, in a church where every ſin has its price, and admits of commutations, that many ſins will be committed. And pray what elſe is Calviniſm, but a *commuting ſyſtem*, where conſiderations foreign to moral character are made to ſupply the want of it; where an external and vicarious righteouſneſs is ſubſtituted in the room of a real and perſonal one? And do not many, whoſe lives ſtand condemned by the principles of chriſtianity, avail themſelves of this ſyſtem in the very article of death? Calviniſm is the refuge they fly to in the critical moments of life, when all others fail them. And even this will dreadfully diſappoint them at laſt. In all trials

trials before human courts of juſtice, perſons are treated either in the way of acquittal or condemnation, according to the reſpective innocence or guilt appearing in their characters, which is certainly one great ſecurity of virtue and good morals; but conſidered as the ſubjects of God and Chriſt, their acquittal at the laſt day will not, it ſeems, depend upon their own *perſonal* integrity, but a *borrowed* one. Now, whether ſuch a notion as this be friendly to the intereſts of virtue is left to yourſelf, and every other impartial perſon to judge. Give me leave, before I conclude this letter, to ſubjoin an obſervation of the ingenious and learned Mr. *Rollin*, "Some religion," ſays he, "is neceſſary to mankind. "They cannot be without it, and the "principles of it are too deeply implanted "in the heart to be wholly ſuppreſſed. "But then they would have it to be in-"dulgent, eaſy, and complaiſant; and "that, inſtead of laying reſtraints on their "inclinations, ſhould authorize or excuſe "them." A religion thus indulgent will always attract the attention of the people, and the *Demagogue* who throws upon it the

moſt flattering colours, is ſure of being their idol.

I am, yours.

LETTER XIV.

SIR,

IN your laſt, you expreſs ſome ſurprize at the conduct of *Divines*, in conniving at the corruptions which they ought rather to remove. I do aſſure you I have not a great deal to ſay in their favour. The evils complained of, had their firſt exiſtence in their avarice, pride, and ambition. They were the firſt to lead the people into errors, and many of them, I ſuppoſe, ſtill find it their intereſt that they ſhould remain there. You are not to expect that the clergy ſhould ever reform the church upon its preſent plan. There are too many weights in the oppoſite ſcale; and where truth and intereſt come in competition, I know but too well which muſt preponderate. *A lucrative* theology, be it ever ſo abſurd,

abſurd, will find ready admiſſion into low and illiberal minds. There are not, perhaps, any religious principles whatever more indefenſible, in every view, or more deſtructive of morality, than thoſe of Calviniſm; and yet where ſhall you find a *Theologian* * that will openly diſclaim and diſavow them? or one that will defend them by other arguments than thoſe of *Anathemas* and *Execrations?* I and others have lately had ſome ſpecimens of the politeneſs and humanity, by which they are diſtinguiſhed in this reſpect. What a ſhame it is that any one calling himſelf a teacher of truth and virtue ſhould avail himſelf of thoſe popular prejudices, and pernicious principles, which a regard to duty, if he underſtands it, obliges him to extirpate. I would not, by what I have

* The diſtinction of Calviniſm into *moderate* and *immoderate*, if you pleaſe, which ſome make, I could never ſee the propriety of. A moderate Calviniſt is a heterogeneous being, for whom there is no name; for I know no medium between *Calviniſm*, properly ſo called, and *Socinianiſm*. The latter is a ſcheme friendly to virtue, and permits one to go quietly through the world in the exerciſe of his reaſonable faculties. The former is a religious *ſcare-crow*, that like the inquiſition, in popiſh countries, has long ſerved the purpoſe of making hypocrites and ſlaves in Proteſtant ones.

ſaid,

ſaid, be underſtood to inſinuate a contempt for popular prejudices, or that they ought to be treated with contempt. I would have them, on the other hand, treated with all imaginable lenity. I would have allowances made for education, and other circumſtances that may demand indulgence; but, nevertheleſs, think it extremely wrong to rivet unreaſonable prejudices, as many do, inſtead of attempting their removal; to ſacrifice truth to filthy lucre, and the low itch of popularity.

It would be ſuppoſing you a greater ſtranger to mankind and the world than you really are, not to know that there are rogues in all profeſſions, and that a *prieſt* who urges an attachment to principles which himſelf believes nothing of, and has never examined, ſtands in the front of them. That *ſuch* there are, is a point about which you and I can have no diſpute. *Trimming* divinity is now ſo much the mode, that what is *truth* at one time, ſhall be *falſhood* at another, if the people would have it ſo, or the prieſt finds it his intereſt it ſhould be ſo; and it is not ſeldom that we ſee *Religious Demagogues* veering about with

with every wind, and becoming *all things to all men* in the worſt ſenſe. With *ſuch*, the ſalvation of ſouls (a favourite phraſe) is but a *ſecondary* conſideration; if, indeed, it is any at all. For if the wind of popularity blow not full in their face from one point, they are ſure to tack about, and ſet their ſails to another; and thus *Deiſm*, and even *Atheiſm* itſelf find their beſt advocates in thoſe who do the moſt loudly exclaim againſt both. I ſhall not trouble you, or the reader, with any more remarks on the ſubject. Your own good ſenſe and reading will ſupply you with better helps than I can furniſh, to ſee the futility, not to ſay immorality of this and ſome other doctrines that have long diſgraced the pulpit, and been a dead weight upon the religion of Jeſus. With all imaginable eſteem,

I remain, yours.

A letter from the Rev. Dr. Duchal *of Dublin, to the Rev. Dr.* Taylor *of Norwich, firſt printed in the* Theological Repoſitory, N° IV. Vol. II. *p.* 328.

DEAR SIR,

TO you it muſt have a ſtrange appearance, that I have delayed ſo long to anſwer your letter, and perhaps I ſhall appear no leſs trifling in the anſwer I give, than I have been in deferring it ſo long. However, I ſhall not add to my fault by a tedious apology, which, if made at all, muſt be taken from circumſtances, which it would ſerve no ſort of purpoſe to communicate. I ſhall, therefore, proceed to make ſome friendly obſervations on your book concerning Atonement.

Your

Your ſentiments with reſpect to the efficacy of the ſufferings and death of our bleſſed Saviour, are, in a few words, ſo fully and clearly expreſſed in p. 91 and 92, that I think it not needful to quote any other paſſages. "I conclude, therefore, "that the ſacrifice of Chriſt was truly and "properly, in the higheſt degree, and far "beyond any other, piacular and expia-"tory, to make atonement for, or to take "away ſin. Not only to give us an ex-"ample; not only to aſſure us of the re-"miſſion, or to procure our Lord a com-"miſſion to publiſh the forgiveneſs of "ſin; but, moreover, to obtain that for-"giveneſs, by doing what God, in his "wiſdom, judged fit and expedient to be "done, in order to the forgiveneſs of ſin, "and *without which, he* did not think it "fit and expedient to grant the forgive-"neſs of ſin."

Now, Sir, it is certain, that God cannot do what is not fit and expedient to be done. And, if it was not fit and expedient to forgive ſin without the interpoſition of ſuch an expiation or atonement, then that atonement was really neceſſary to our obtaining

obtaining pardon. This seems to me, to be pressed with great difficulties.

That God would forgive sin to the truly penitent and reformed, must have been an article of natural religion in all ages, and a fundamental article too. For, surely, if there was not hope of pardon upon repentance and reformation, despair must necessarily seize and possess every offender, that is, every man, and there must have been an end of all religion. But, on the contrary, how naturally must men be led, from just notions of the goodness of God, and from the universal, most compassionable infirmity and imperfection of human nature, to believe, that God would be merciful to the penitent, and receive them into favour? And, how astonishing must the severity of the divine administration appear, if it should have been supposed to cut off all offenders, however penitent, and so the whole human race, without exception, from mercy and forgiveness? It seems to have been impossible, that any wise men could ever have entertained such a notion; and therefore, they must necessarily have fallen into the other with much as-

ſurance, viz. that God would graciouſly forgive the ſincerely penitent.

Now, however ſhocking the ſeverity juſt mentioned may appear, it ſeems to follow in a juſt conſequence from this principle, that ſomething, abſolutely independent of the offenders, and which will be allowed to be voluntary in the ſupreme mind (in this ſenſe of the word *voluntary*, that he might have with-held it) was requiſite to make it fit and expedient for him to pardon. For, had he with-held it, no pardon could have been granted. We are, in the holy ſcriptures, repreſented as under the greateſt poſſible obligations to the goodneſs of God, for ſending his only begotten ſon into the world, to ſuffer and die for us; and can this be the meaning of it, that we are under the greateſt obligations to him for doing a thing, which, if he had not done, his own adminiſtration would have been ſevere and rigorous, and unworthy of himſelf?

Add to this, that there can be nothing more plain, than that mankind, in this world, are placed in a ſtate of diſcipline, in

in which it is intended that, from the firſt beginings and rudiments of virtue, they ſhould make progreſs towards a ſtate of maturity and perfection, daily correcting what hath been amiſs, growing in good affections, and advancing in holineſs. Now, in ſuch a ſtate, the forgiveneſs of faults and follies, upon repentance and reformation, ſeems to be really eſſential to the deſign of that ſtate, an eſſential part of it rather, and to follow it as naturally as light and ſhadows go together. If there be no forgiveneſs, it is in vain to ſpeak of diſcipline in creatures morally imperfect.

Theſe are ſome of the difficulties which preſs the opinion, that there was a fitneſs and expediency in forgiving ſin in purſuance of an atonement or expiation, ſuch, that without that atonement, God did not think it fit and expedient to forgive ſin, in other words, would not, and could not have done it; ſo that, in fact, had not our Lord Jeſus Chriſt come into the world, and ſuffered and died for us, or ſome other atonement which would have anſwered the end, been made, there would have been no forgiveneſs.

Your ſenſe of the value of our Saviour's atoning ſacrifice in the ſight of the Father, and of the efficacy of it as lying in a character, and in the moſt conſummate merit that ever was exhibited on the theatre of this world, is liable to no ſort of objection, as far as I ſee; nor yet is this principle, that the merit of one perſon may be profitable to others, and procure for them certain favours from the ſupreme ruler, which they would not otherwiſe have enjoyed; of which you have, in ſeveral places, given inſtances directly to the point. But, the great queſtion in the preſent caſe is, how far this is to be carried? We may, indeed, conſider the forgiveneſs of ſin under the notion of a mere indemnity, and of delivering the offender from the pains and penalties he has incurred, without his being reſtored to the love and favour of God. But, I think, this is never the meaning of the word *pardon*, in the New Teſtament, which always, as far as I have obſerved, and can remember, ſignifies not only freeing men from deſerved puniſhment, but taking them into the favour and love of God.

If

If this be a juſt repreſentation of the matter, it ought to be carefully attended to. For, undoubtedly, nothing can recommend an offender to the favour and love of God, but ſincere repentance, that is, a new character. Here, our ideas ſeem to be clear, and without all perplexity. God can love nothing but what is in itſelf lovely; and, as he will always love what is in itſelf lovely as ſuch, ſo his love will be in proportion to what is amiable in the object. Here, nothing can determine the ſupreme mind leſs or more, but the quality of the object. No merit of any other perſon can have any place. By the merit of one, certain favours may be procured for another; but love can never be ſo procured. It follows perſonal worth, and that only, and always in proportion to the degree of it. So that, in reality, ſo far as the remiſſion of ſin ſignifies being reſtored to the love of God, nothing can effect this, but the putting on the new man, and an amiable character. No atonement whatever can have the leaſt influence here.

I own, we may imagine to ourſelves, on the other hand, a perſon by ſincere repen-

tance and attaining to a new character, ſuppoſe an eminent one, become the object of his maker's love, and yet caſt into a ſtate of condemnation and puniſhment for the ſin and evil he has done in his former bad ſtate of mind; and, we ſee in human adminiſtrations, the moſt bitter repentance does not hinder the laws from having their courſe, and this for very obvious reaſons, and which perfectly ſatisfy the mind. But, when we imagine ſuch a meaſure in the divine adminiſtration, where the ſtate and diſpoſition of the mind are perfectly known, how dreadfully uneaſy does it ſit upon the human heart? A perſon really the object of God's love, and yet given up to extreme miſery! He is beloved of God, but his treſpaſſes not forgiven him! On the other hand, how agreeable to the heart to believe, that all whom God loveth, ſhall, in proportion as he loveth them, be happy. And, it muſt be owned, to imagine one rule for the exerciſe of the love of God, or for his diſpleaſure, and another rule extremely different for conferring happineſs, or inflicting miſery, is attended with no ſmall difficulties.

But,

But, before I leave this head concerning the efficacy of merit, or eminent virtue in one perſon for procuring favours from God for another, you will allow me to take notice of a paſſage in your book, which, though it does not come in, in chap. viii. yet relates directly to the ſubject. The paſſage is in chap. x. p. 105. "But, par-
"don in the goſpel is raiſed to a very high
"degree, and repentance is there made a-
"vailable, not only to exempt from pu-
"niſhment, but alſo to gain a new and
"glorious ſtate of being in eternal life;
"which ſurely is a ſtretch of favour far
"beyond the natural value of repentance.
"It may be naturally fit to continue in a
"happy ſtate of being unblemiſhed vir-
"tue, a ſinleſs, ſteady obedience, which
"hath done nothing to forfeit, and every
"thing in its power to ſecure the bleſſing
"of its maker; but what claim can a
"ſinner, deſerving of deſtruction, have to
"a glorious immortality in the preſence
"of God, ſuppoſing he does repent and
"reform?"

On all this I would obſerve, that there is no natural value in repentance, by which

it may be ſaid to deſerve, or have a claim to a happy immortality; and that a ſincere penitent, upon his repentance and reformation, has, in point of righteouſneſs, *no ſuch demand, can have no ſuch expectation.* But, I imagine, that we are not at all to direct our hopes from the infinite goodneſs of God, or to meaſure them by any apprehended rule of proportionable merit and reward. Suppoſe an unblemiſhed virtue in this life, and a ſteady ſinleſs obedience from firſt to laſt; who can ſay, that there is any proportion between this and an eternal duration in a ſtate of perfect happineſs?

It has, on the contrary, been ſaid, that if God ſhall pleaſe to bring into being, and continue in it for a longer or ſhorter term, perſons, whoſe exiſtence was a real bleſſing and happineſs to them, while they poſſeſſed it; it would not at all be unrighteous or hard in their maker to deprive them of their being, when the deſigned time of their duration was expired, even ſuppoſing they had, through the whole of life, been perfectly innocent. Their being was ſtill a bleſſing to them. You know, ſome writers

ters of great name have declared themſelves of this opinion. The goodneſs of God is, indeed, ſuppoſed to grant perpetuity of exiſtence to the pure and innocent; but, who would claim ſuch an ineſtimable thing as eternal perfect happineſs, in point of righteouſneſs or equity?

The matter ſeems to be this; that ſuch as are worthy, and the objects of God's favour, ſhall be continued in exiſtence, and made happy in it, we believe from the infinite goodneſs and liberality of the divine mind. It is quite inconceivable that a God of ſuch goodneſs ſhould voluntarily, and without any neceſſity, extinguiſh the being of perſons who are the objects of his favour. If, indeed, in the vaſtneſs of the creation; if in the immenſity of ſpace, there was not room for them; if he did not know how to diſpoſe of them, or what to do with them, ſuch an extinction of beings, good and worthy, might be imagined; but no otherwiſe. And their continuance for ever in being is a thing, the aſſured hope of which does not ariſe from any claim in the way of righteouſneſs, but from the love of God to real and ſubſtantial

tial worth. This muſt ever forbid the perſon who is poſſeſſed of it, to apprehend that God will deſtroy his being. And, in the ſame manner, we cannot but, from the goodneſs and love of God, infer, that, if he continues ſuch in being, he will make that being happy to them.

Now let this be applied to the penitent offender, who is become a new character, and lovely in the ſight of his maker, who perfectly knows his thorough converſion, and that this new character will prove an abiding one; and can it be ſuppoſed he will extinguiſh ſuch a being? This would be, in reality, juſt in the ſame manner inconſiſtent with all our notions of love and goodneſs, as in the caſe already put, of one who had not ſinned. In a word, if the hope of immortal, happy exiſtence, ſprings from merit and the proportioning of reward to it (which cannot be the caſe, but from the goodneſs and love of the ſupreme being) this hope muſt take place in every inſtance in which a perſon is the object of divine love, and is conſcious to himſelf of thoſe qualities which muſt render him ſo. God is love; and

love

love will never deſtroy its own object in any caſe; and if it preſerves its object in exiſtence, it will likewiſe unqueſtionably make that exiſtence happy.

Let it then be ſuppoſed, that by means of our bleſſed Saviour, and in reſpect to his conſummate merit, we enjoy high eternal advantages, which we ſhould not otherwiſe have enjoyed; yet, on the other hand, *to imagine it poſſible*, that immortal happineſs ſhould not be conferred on the perſons who are the objects of divine love, is extremely hard. Surely, if love follows the new amiable character of a ſincere penitent, immortal, happy exiſtence muſt follow that love.

The paragraph which goes before that from which the laſt quotation is taken, relates directly to the main ſubject, and the principal difficulty which lies in our way in treating it. There, p. 104, you ſay, "But, God muſt here be conſidered in "a public capacity as a magiſtrate, as "the governor of the univerſe; and ſin "as the only diſorder, miſchief, and mi-"ſery, among his ſubjects, which alone "can

" can corrupt and ruin them, and which, " therefore, above all things, he muſt be " concerned to prevent and reform; now, " in this view, are we ſure that a ſimple " abſolute pardon, even of the penitent, " is agreeable to rectoral goodneſs, and " the ends of government, which are the " good order and happineſs of the rational " creation?" And again, p. 105. "Eaſy, " indiſcreet pardons may give encourage- " ment to tranſgreſſion, and forgiveneſs " lightly obtained, may give a light opi- " nion of wickedneſs, not only to the of- " fender himſelf, but to all his fellow " ſubjects."

Here, it may be obſerved, that, according to the goſpel ſcheme, the pardon of the penitent is, in fact, as ſimple, as abſolute, as if there had been no atonement or expiation at all, *i. e.* nothing is required of them but repentance for the remiſſion of ſin. Indeed, if any thing laborious or expenſive had been required of *them*, if any pains or penalties had been inflicted on *them*, it might have been ſaid, that their forgiveneſs was not lightly obtained; but as the goſpel expiation was provided for them,

them, and independent altogether of them, nay, without ſo much as their knowledge, the pardon *with reſpect to them* is as lightly obtained, as if there had been no ſuch expiation. This is ſo plainly the fact, that there needs no enlargement. And ſo, if the ſtreſs of the cauſe is laid upon the unfitneſs of *their* obtaining pardon lightly, the unqueſtionable fact overthrows the argument for expiation taken from it.

But let us ſuppoſe, that rectoral goodneſs ſaw it fit to inſiſt on an expiation, fit to anſwer the ends of government, and ſupport the order and happineſs of the moral creation; particularly, that tranſgreſſion might be diſcouraged, and that obtaining forgiveneſs lightly, might not give a light opinion of wickedneſs to the offender himſelf or his fellow-ſubjects; the great queſtion is this, what preciſe inſtruction, by the pardoning of ſin in purſuance of an expiation, and not without it, was intended to be conveyed to the offender or his fellow-ſubjects? Is the meaning of it a declaration, that pardon is not at all to be expected without expiation? And, notwithſtanding the moſt ſincere repentance, there

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ſhall not be any forgiveneſs? That even with reſpect to creatures from the very firſt, in a ſtate of imperfection and diſcipline (for this muſt be taken in to make the argument concluſive to the point in queſtion) this ſhall be the rule of the divine adminiſtration? If this be the inſtruction intended by it, it has, indeed, a plain tendency to make the ſubjects of God's moral kingdom afraid of ſinning and breaking his laws; but what is the light in which it ſets God's government? Had not an expiation or atonement been made for me, which was not in my power, and in which no agency of mine could have any influence, it depending intirely upon the will of another, I muſt have for ever deſpaired of pardon, notwithſtanding the moſt ſincere repentance.

This ſeems to me to be a fair repreſentation, and if ſuch is the inſtruction intended to be given by expiation, it is well worthy of being conſidered ſeriouſly, whether it can, in the eye of the moral creation, do honour to God's government, and recommend it to their eſteem, or him to their love; but, if this is not the inſtruction

tion this conſtitution gives, what is the inſtruction whereby honour is done to our Maker? The plain meaning ſeems to be; you ſhall have pardon, but, you ſhall not have it lightly; and if that is not done which ſhall prevent the imputation of it being lightly given, you ſhall not have it at all.

Let it be added to all, that, in the account you give of the particular reaſons why this method of expiation was taken, which appeared to me to be an excellent one, the tendency of what our bleſſed Saviour has done and ſuffered to deliver us from the power of ſin, and to make us holy in all manner of converſation, is that which you have principally inſiſted upon. It is granted, that the great immediate influence is on us, to bring us to a thorough repentance and reformation of life. And you ſay, very juſtly, that therefore this expiation is honourable on God's part, and does honour to his government, becauſe it is the moſt effectual means of promoting repentance and holineſs of life. Is not then repentance, is not reformation of life and holineſs, the direct end of expiation, without

without which, with reſpect to individuals, it muſt have been fruitleſs and vain? And, will not the whole, at laſt, come to this, that God choſe to forgive ſin in that manner, that might moſt effectually promote repentance and reformation? And, is not the obvious inference from this, that, where repentance and reformation are really found, the great, though not the only end of expiation, and that which rendered it ſo highly honourable to the divine government, is anſwered; and whether men know any thing of it or not, or indeed, whether the expiation and atonement had been made or not, their ſins ſhould have been forgiven them?

Thus, Sir, I have, with the greateſt frankneſs, laid before you, the difficulties which have occurred to my own mind; and, as you will, as a lover of, and an earneſt ſearcher after truth, be pleaſed with this, ſo you will the more readily excuſe my freedom, and eſpecially if any thing improper has dropped from me, when I aſſure you, there is nothing in this world I can more earneſtly deſire, than to ſee this matter cleared up in all reſpects. In the

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mean time, I think the Chriſtian world is greatly obliged to you, for the labour you have beſtowed on this important ſubject, which is *indeed not in vain*; for, I am perſuaded, you have furniſhed us with the true key for opening a way through the difficulties that have been thought to attend it. I ſhall, in the remaining part of this tedious letter, in a few looſe hints, lay before you what has been ſuggeſted to my thoughts in purſuing your plan.

I do not find that the ſcripture ſays much concerning the *neceſſity* of expiation and atonement, in order to the forgiveneſs of ſin. That God has appointed the great expiation by the blood of Chriſt, is evident. And, we ſee, the Jewiſh conſtitution was ſuch, that, without ſhedding of blood there was no remiſſion. But, all will allow, that this conſtitution was poſitive. And, in the patriarchal religion, we do not meet with any ſacrifices for ſin, though there is, in the ſacred records, frequent mention of altars and ſacrifices. We read likewiſe in Luke xxiv. 26, that "Chriſt *ought* to have ſuffered theſe things, "and to enter into his glory." But ſurely, this may refer to a poſitive conſtitution

and appointment, and not to any *neceſſity* antecedent to that appointment. If there are any expreſſions in ſcripture which plainly point out an antecedent *neceſſity*, they have eſcaped me. As for that in Rom. iii. 26, your paraphraſe hath cleared the ſenſe of the place, and overthrown the argument raiſed upon it. The truth is, the neceſſity of expiation (and, what is ſaid of neceſſity may be applied to expediency, which amounts to a moral neceſſity) is a notion which men ſeem to have taken from conſidering the ſufferings and death of Chriſt, as a proper ſatisfaction to the juſtice of God, rather than from any expreſs declarations of ſcripture. Or, they have argued, *a poſteriori*, that ſuch an amazing thing as the death of our Saviour would never have been, if it was not neceſſary.

But let it be ſuppoſed, that God both could and would have forgiven ſin without any expiation, other than the ſincere repentance of the offender, if no other had, by his infinite wiſdom, been appointed, and would have continued the penitent in exiſtence, and made that exiſtence happy; yet, upon this ſuppoſition, there ſeem to be very

very noble ends anſwered by the ſacrifice of our Saviour, and which are indeed worthy of ſuch an interpoſition, and ſuch a ſcene of wonders. The plain fact, which cannot be conteſted by any believer, is this, that, our bleſſed Saviour, being obedient unto death, even the death of the croſs, therefore God hath exalted him, given him a name above every name, inveſted him with authority to pardon, and give eternal life to his ſervants; and, in one word, made him the bleſſed channel by which all divine favours and bleſſings flow out to us.

Here was, on our Saviour's part, the moſt conſummate merit that ever was exhibited, and moſt pleaſing to the Father, a merit which approved itſelf in the greateſt trials, and which, without ſuch trials, could not have been ſo conſpicuous. Our Lord was made perfect by his ſufferings. Now the crowning this merit with ſuch peculiar glory and power, was the moſt ſolemn teſtimony the parent of the univerſe could give of his love of virtue and worth, as in his eye the moſt excellent of all things, and that it ſhould always be the object of his favour and care. To this

merit we ſee the greateſt reſpect and regard is had which could poſſibly be had. He has obtained a name above every name, and all things are put under him, he only excepted who did put all things under him. And, on account of his merit, we obtain many favours and privileges which we ſhould not otherwiſe have enjoyed, which lays us under ſtrong obligations to him.

Again; as this conſtitution of the mediatorial kingdom did the greateſt honour to our Saviour, ſo our receiving the remiſſion of ſin and the bleſſings of the goſpel covenant in this manner, is a conſtant memorial to us of our own unworthineſs, and a wonderful and moſt effectual manner of impreſſing our minds with a juſt ſenſe of ſin. This ſeems to be one great, perhaps the principal intention of conferring any favours on the ill-deſerving by a mediator of diſtinguiſhed merit, conſtituted ſuch on account of his merit, and it is very expreſsly intimated in the holy ſcriptures. And I make no doubt to ſay, it is an end worthy of being ſerved by ſuch extraordinary means. For if moral rectitude be the moſt excellent of all things in the creation of God, and which he has made

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the ſource of higheſt happineſs, and moral turpitude the moſt deformed and miſerable; to impreſs the mind deeply with this, is the greateſt and moſt important ſervice which *can be done* to moral agents in a ſtate of diſcipline. And therefore, no means which can poſſibly anſwer this end, can be too great to be uſed, nothing that can be done or ſuffered too valuable to anſwer it. And a diſpenſation calculated to ſerve this purpoſe, however extraordinary that diſpenſation may be, is perfectly worthy of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God. It is, indeed, no difficult matter in general, to convince men of the evil of ſin in point of ſpeculation, and of the miſery to which it expoſes them; but the hardeſt thing in the world, *to make them feel this conviction, ſo as to break off their ſins, and turn to true holineſs of life.* And it would ſeem, if there be any ingenuouſneſs of heart felt, that nothing can ſo much prepare the mind for this, as conſidering ſeriouſly, that to call and engage us to repentance, this divine perſon came into the world, and ſuffered and died for us. Who would not flee from that unhappy ſtate from which he came to redeem us? Who would not embrace that happineſs to which he came

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to exalt us? But theſe things are much more fully and ſtrongly expreſſed in your book, and ſo there needs no enlargement upon them.

However, it is undoubtedly to be conſidered as one great end of this mediation, that our minds may be deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of unworthineſs and guilt, and it ſpeaks the divine intention to make this impreſſion moſt ſenſible and laſting, that ſuch extraordinary means are uſed. And here I think the greateſt ſtreſs is to be laid. By this conſtitution the parent of our ſpirits has taken the moſt effectual method of impreſſing our ſpirits as he would have them impreſſed, and to give us *ſuch a ſenſe of things as he would have us ever to retain*. The means uſed, are indeed, moſt amazing, but evidently fit to anſwer the end, and known in experience to be ſo.

As to the ſcriptural expreſſions concerning ſacrifices for ſin (evidently the Jewiſh phraſeology) if it ſhould be alledged, that all that is here ſaid concerning mediation does not come up to the proper and full meaning of them, you have indeed, furniſhed me with an anſwer. Many of theſe

expreſſions

expreſſions are of a figurative kind; and bold and ſtrong figures they are. However, perhaps the cleareſt and ſimpleſt idea of ſacrifice, is, that it is the offering up of a life to the honour of God, and, indeed, in an act of religious worſhip. And ſurely, our Saviour's offering himſelf on the croſs to ſerve the purpoſes of divine goodneſs, by which he did the higheſt poſſible honour to the Father, may be very properly termed a ſacrifice. And may it not be very properly termed a ſacrifice for ſin, inaſmuch as this glorious act of obedience, which was ſo pleaſing to the Father, was performed on the behalf of ſinners, and was the condition upon which he obtained power to pronounce an authoritative pardon. This power was given him as the reward of his conſummate merit, which merit evidently lies as the foundation of the whole chriſtian œconomy.

I am, dear Sir,

Your moſt affectionate,

and obedient ſervant,

J. DUCHAL.

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